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> Dickinson was not a librarian, remaining indoors in order to sort her reading and sift her emotions into little packets reminiscent of a card catalog.
> -- Shira Wolosky, Emily Dickinson: A Voice of War

It seems true that Emily Dickinson was not a sorter or a sifter. Uncontrollable forces like floods and volcanoes and hauntings overwhelm her poems and letters; she reports experiences of boundlessness and awe, receives "Bulletins all Day from Immortality" (quoted in Habegger, 489). Yet the temptation to cast Dickinson as a librarian, presiding over the reliquary of her hand-stitched, homemade chapbooks, is a natural response to her fascination with the strange power of objects. Souvenirs of the uncanny, like daguerreotypes, pinned moths, and the personal effects of the dead, appear throughout the Complete Poems. Wolosky's point, then, is useful in creating a distinction between two sorts of librarians: one who is preoccupied with order and preservation, and one who is fascinated with books and relics because of their capacity for creating disorder along the boundaries of the ordinary and the otherworldly.

The project of determining which sort of librarian Dickinson was can also be understood as an attempt to elucidate Dickinson's notion of herself as a poet by examining the way the uncanny object functions in her particular vision of the world. Particularly useful in this undertaking is Susan Stewart's book On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection, which uses literary, psychoanalytic and sociological strategies to explore "the ways in which the 'souvenir' and the 'collection' are objects mediating experience in time and space" (copy). Stewart's ideas about the relationship of the souvenir to narrative are highly applicable to

Dickinson's work and our understandings of it, especially the tendency to conjure Dickinson the librarian, the sifter, the collector. This version of the poet is unquestionably grounded in her writing, but her fascination for objects and collecting is in actuality far more complex, as Stewart can help us to recognize. Wherever Dickinson begins to gather, to sort and arrange, what emerges is her desire to transcend the ordinary and enter the world of death, or of nature, or of the poetic sublime. Along with this desire comes her persistent doubt of her own ability to achieve transcendence, as well as her doubt of the souvenir's capacity to help her do so.

"Of nearness to her sundered Things," a poem set in a parlor piled with graveyard artifacts, helps establish the intricacies of Dickinson's notions of the uncanny, with particular respect to the collection.

> The Shapes we buried, dwell about
> Familiar, in the Rooms—
> Untarnished by the Sepulchre,
> The Mouldering Playmate comes—
>
> In just the Jacket that he wore—
> Long buttoned in the Mold
> Since we—old mornings, Children—played—
> Divided—by a world—
>
> The Grave yields back her Robberies—
> The Years, our pilfered Things—
> Bright Knots of Apparitions
> Salute us, with their wings—
>
> As we—it were—that perished—
> Themselves—had just remained till we rejoin them—
> And 'twas they, and not ourself
> That mourned.
>
> (J, 607)

The division of worlds that the speaker refers to in the second stanza is central to the literary and psychological concept of the uncanny, which holds that the familiar-yet-strange experience of the uncanny is a "borderline phenomenon," occurring on the threshold between two worlds so dissimilar as to seem irreconcilable (McNeil 139). In this poem, the division is between the living and the dead, a rift that Dickinson was deeply preoccupied with trying to mediate. "Of nearness" amounts to an example of this sort of attempt, and the gathering of uncanny souvenirs (buried Shapes and pilfered Things) is part of her strategy of transcendence. The line "Divided—by a world—" is immediately followed by "the Grave yield[ing] back her Robberies," as if raiding a tomb could compensate for the metaphysical gulf the grave represents. Of course it is the grave rather than the mourners that Dickinson casts as a robber, which makes the return of the Shapes and Things an attempt at restoration rather than disruption. The trove of restored objects, now souvenirs of death, transforms the parlor into a reliquary of sorts. In this way the domain of the living is imbued with a deathlike presence, bringing it closer to Dickinson's vision of a reunion between worlds.

Thomas Johnson's edition of the Complete Poems places "Of nearness to her sundered Things" in 1862, as the United States responded to the first waves of Civil War casualties. Within this culture, the idea of the souvenir played a complex role, which informs Dickinson's notions of the uncanny object. According to Drew Gilpin Faust, "Soldiers' personal possessions often took on the character of memento mori, relics that retained and represented something of the spirit of the departed" (29). Families went to great lengths to locate personal effects like crosses and photographs, as well as bullets and locks of hair, even going so far as to dig up soldiers' graves in search of these items.

While souvenirs like these had deep sentimental value, the cultural response to war deaths also included a certain level of morbid curiosity. Tourists were known to gather at battlefields, swarms of civilians attempting to vicariously experience the "sublimity of a battle scene" (85). Fostered by voyeurism as well as genuine grief, the tourist / antiquarian mentality pervaded nineteenth-century notions of death.

The supernatural parlor-as-reliquary in "Of nearness to her sundered Things" helps represent the culture Faust describes. As we read, we see how the accumulation of uncanny objects results in a collapse of boundaries between worlds, both in the resurrection of the Mouldering Playmate and the speaker's uncertainty about her own mortal status. In this respect, the function of the souvenir of death is very similar to that of the ordinary tourist's souvenir, as Susan Stewart describes it: "The souvenir seeks distance (the exotic in time and space), but it does so in order to transform and collapse distance into proximity to, or approximation with, the self. The souvenir therefore contracts the world in order to expand the personal" (xii). Certainly the mourner's desire to contract the world and bring herself nearer to her sundered things is far more pressing than the motives of the average tourist or collector. Still, there is a thrilled tone lurking in much of Dickinson's writing about death, an ecstatic curiosity that bears a likeness to voyeurism. In any case, her use of talismans in this poem and elsewhere is fundamentally consistent with Stewart's understanding of souvenirs and their perceived capacity for channeling the exotic or the otherworldly.

Dickinson implies a certain level of uncertainty about the success of this strategy. While the reality of the poem allows for the existence of supernatural beings like zombies and "Bright Knots of Apparitions," the speaker hesitates to claim that the

grave has fully merged with the parlor. She says it is *as if* the living have perished and the dead mourn, but she stops at the threshold of a complete reversal or reunion. This speaks to Gary Lee Stonum's point that "Dickinson lingers with the sublime and with a poetry that hovers between determinate states" (quoted in Deppman, 7). Like the tourists on the sidelines of Civil War battlefields, Dickinson's speaker seeks a vicarious experience that brings her to the edge of the other world, but not all the way into it.

This liminal position also indicates a refusal to commit to a single understanding of reality as a closed system. Stewart sees a desire for a unifying logic in stories about animated objects: "Hence we can see the many narratives that dream of the inanimate-made-animate as symptomatic of all narrative's desire to invent a realizable world, a world which 'works.' In this sense, every narrative is a miniature and every book a microcosm, for such forms always seek to finalize, bring closure to, a totality or model" (Stewart, xi-xii). By contrast, Dickinson makes a habit of harnessing language and form in order to *deny* the organizing tendencies of narrative, using counterintuitive metaphors, undermining traditional syntax and shooting her poems through with disorienting dashes. "Of nearness" is no exception to this. The poem registers the desire for closure and logic that Stewart describes, with particular relevance to the grieving process, but it refuses the ultimate gratification of this desire as the speaker maintains her uncertainty about whether she has truly glimpsed death.

More than simply resisting the temptation to create "a world which works," Dickinson actively dismantles these self-contained worlds, and uses uncanny devices to this end. Indeed, skepticism and uncertainty are among the states of mind that uncanny, gothic and horror genres are most interested in trying to express and explore. In his essay

on the uncanny, Freud discusses intellectual uncertainty as "the essential factor in the production of the feeling of uncanniness…" When Dickinson imagines a parlor overrun by a graveyard, then, she applies an uncanny skepticism to the shared narrative of life and death and its assumptions about temporal and spatial order. Shira Wolosky broadens this point when she argues that

> [Dickinson's] poems typically present temporal and causal discontinuities, ateleological organizations, and irregular prosody. Examination of these formal characteristics suggests that departures from linguistic convention are a function of a growing doubt concerning traditional metaphysical sanctions for causality, teleology, and axiology…The possible collapse of such categories is a theme in many Dickinson poems, which present the world as it would appear without them. (xv)

Certainly no librarian would preside over a world that lacks categories for ordering experience. The rigorous skepticism that Wolosky sees in Dickinson demands such a radically disorienting uncertainty that the reader, like the protagonist of a ghost story, begins to wonder how she might navigate her surroundings without a reliable system or narrative for making sense of them.

Dickinson frequently turns to intuition as an alternative to logical narratives, using her strange perceptive powers to explore the half-collapsed, ateleological world that Wolosky describes. While Dickinson's skepticism extends to intuition as well as logic, she is deeply invested in attempting to isolate and understand the poet's experience of heightened perception. In the following lines, she suggests that to die is to move outside the realm where it is possible to tell stories, and thus to form rational systems for establishing comprehension.

> Gathered into the Earth,
> And out of story—

Gathered to that strange Fame—
That lonesome Glory
That hath no omen here—but Awe—
(J, 1370)

Though dying means departing the earthly narrative of human events, Dickinson declares that the dead are nevertheless rewarded with fame and glory, the products of storytelling. We are to infer that the essential quality of fame or myth is not generated exclusively by the construction and repetition of narrative; Dickinson believes in an inaccessible source of fame and glory based solely on the reverence she feels, her intuitive experience of "Awe."

Dickinson's dismissal of the necessity of narrative in the production of the mythical contains an implicit dismissal of the souvenir, and its role as an anchor for narrative. Not only do the dead exist outside of "story," there is no souvenir, like Shapes and Things in "Of nearness," that sufficiently represents the glory and mystery of death. Instead, this mythic quality "hath no omen here—but Awe—" With "Gathered into the Earth," Dickinson strips away the structure and symbolism of her craft, leaving only the poetic consciousness that exists at its center. In this way, she seems to assert the poet's privileged access to transcendent meaning. Any collector can construct a narrative around an object, attributing it with cultural significance or sentimental value, but it takes an augur to identify an omen:

This was a Poet—It is That
Distills amazing sense
From ordinary Meanings
And Attar so immense

From the familiar species
That perished by the Door—
We wonder it was not Ourselves

Arrested it—before
(J, 448)

In Goblin with a Gauge, her study of Dickinson and the gothic, Daneen Wardrop writes of this poem, "We imagine Dickinson would find dry leaves, burrs, and cocoons…also sediment and debris, reminders that death forever encroaches; however, what she finds there in the jamb, stuck in the hinge at the threshold, delivers the raw material of her art" (30). Like the sundered Things, the familiar species are souvenirs of death. The crucial difference is that the familiar species are crushed for attar, distilled by the mechanism of the poet's perception. As Wardrop notes, the uncanniness of the leaves, burrs and cocoons is reinforced by their liminal position in the doorway. What is ordinary outside the poet's house and gaze becomes amazing within; the threshold of the door marks a halfway point in its transformation.

Ultimately it is this transformative moment, both in poetry and lived experience, that is most compelling for Dickinson. She writes frequently about states of awe and transport, but remains preoccupied with unanswerable questions about the nature of the events which brought her there. Even as she seems to resign herself to bewilderment, she persists in ransacking language for a way to express the peculiarities of the sublime:

Why Bliss so scantily disburse—
Why Paradise defer—
Why Floods be served to Us—in Bowls—
I speculate no more—
(J, 756)

She does continue to speculate, though, recognizing in Paradise the feeling of floodedness, of having her boundaries overrun by a force that is beyond her control and overwhelms her in scale. The bowl that holds the flood is its own sort of uncanny object,

in the sense that it functions as a mediator of the ordinary and the amazing. In "You cannot put a Fire out," she uses a similar metaphor system of flood and uncanny container:

> You cannot put a fire out—
> A Thing that can ignite
> Can go, itself, without a Fan—
> Upon the slowest Night—
>
> You cannot fold a Flood—
> And put it in a Drawer—
> Because the Winds would find it out—
> And tell your Cedar Floor—
>
> (J, 530)

Here, flood, fire and wind act according to rules that are beyond the speaker's full comprehension. The poem's tone is explanatory, but the puzzling irrelevance of its explanations serves to acknowledge the behavior of the elements as unaccountable. This mysterious causelessness is consistent with Dickinson's experiences of sublime forces as impossible to track or control. The only way to approach an understanding of the sublime, for Dickinson, is through an imaginative observation of the strange patterns of her own mind. Her vision of a fire that ignites and extinguishes itself of its own accord seems analogous to her own creative facilities, as does the flood the drawer cannot contain.

It is worth noting how strongly this image contrasts with the one Wolosky conjures, of Dickinson the librarian, sifting her feelings into little packets. The contrast manifests itself in terms of scale and proportion: where the librarian's feelings fit in their assigned containers, Dickinson's overwhelm their surroundings, whether a bowl, a drawer, a room, or a house. Consider one of her most famous poems:

I dwell in Possibility—
A fairer House than Prose—
More numerous of Windows—
Superior—for Doors—

Of Chambers as the Cedars—
Impregnable of Eye—
And for an Everlasting Roof
The Gambrels of the Sky—

Of Visitors—the fairest—
For Occupation—This—
The spreading wide my narrow Hands
To gather Paradise—
(J, 657)

The house is notable for the permeability of its thresholds: doors, windows, and open roof. Dickinson values this house, here an analog for poetry, for its lacunae, and for the contrast in scale it provides. Trying to contain the sky in a house is much like serving a flood in a bowl, or, for that matter, gathering up Paradise with a pair of narrow hands. In repeatedly producing uncanny images of an ordinary, miniature world overwhelmed by the sublime, Dickinson imaginatively recreates and attempts to understand the intricacies of her "Occupation" as a poet.

Up to this point, I have established Dickinson's reasons for remaining skeptical of the tourism of the mourner and the souvenirs of the otherworldly as legitimate avenues towards visionary experience. On the other hand, I have attempted to salvage the legitimacy of the souvenir by arguing that Dickinson's poetic consciousness is what allows her collections to live rather than rot as relics, her gaze lending them a power they would otherwise lack. What remains to be articulated is how, precisely, the poetic consciousness might resuscitate the failed promises of the souvenir and save Dickinson

from a career as a librarian. Her experiments in form bespeak an ongoing concern with what Susan Stewart calls "the skewed relation between meaning and materiality" (38), or the complications that come with allowing an object to represent an abstraction. This breach is central to the problem of uncanny objects, because it gets to the heart of what makes the souvenir such a strange phenomenon: In what reality might a piece of jewelry truly bring us closer to a dead friend? How did this ordinary object come to signify a world wholly inaccessible to us? In the style, structure, and physical presentation of her writing, Dickinson examines and addresses this cognitive breach between the material and the conceptual, particularly as it applies to poetry. As we consider Dickinson's handling of materiality and meaning, we turn to the uncanny objects that comprise her artistic project: her fascicles, her herbarium, and her letters.

The Fascicles

Emily Dickinson sewed her poems together in tiny chapbooks known as fascicles. In anatomy, fascicles are small bundles of skeletal muscles or nerve fibers bound up together in protective tissue; the word can also refer to flower cuttings used in botanical descriptions, or collections of pine needles. Size and scale are clearly important here, as they are in any discussion of the uncanny, because as Susan Stewart points out, "scale is established by means of a set of correspondences to the familiar" (46). Notions of size, collection, and categorization unite all the definitions of "fascicle" with the sense of the word that refers to a small book or section of a book. Stewart claims that "the book collector is caught up in the maniacal desire of the museologist; his or her nostalgia is for an absolute presence between signifier and signified, between object and context" (34).

Dickinson, though, is interested in interrogating this absolute presence, asking how a word, poem, or book can fully contain or identify with the aspect of experience it sets out to explore. Here, the issue of physical scale becomes tangled up in the representation of abstract concepts. Stewart goes on to discuss the miniature book and minute writing, or micrographia, in these terms: "Nearly invisible, the mark continues to signify; it is a signification which is increased rather than diminished by its minuteness. The miniature book delights in tormenting the wound of this relation [meaning and materiality]" (38). If this is so, then it should come as no surprise that Dickinson took up the practice of binding her work into miniature books, the presentation amplifying the content of her poems by bringing their questions to a physical level.

Dickinson's enthusiasm for book collecting is recorded in her verse, in terms that reveal her appreciation for the book's uncanny properties:

> A precious—mouldering pleasure—'tis—
> To meet an Antique Book—
> In just the Dress his Century wore—
> A privilege—I think—
>
> His venerable Hand to take—
> And warming in our own—
> A passage back—or two—to make—
> To Times when he—was young…
>
> He traverses—familiar—
> As One should come to Town—
> And tell you all your Dreams—were true—
> He lived—where Dreams were born—
>
> His presence is Enchantment—
> You beg him not to go—
> Old Volumes shake their Vellum Heads
> And tantalize—just so—
>
> (J, 371)

The personification of the antique book as a time traveler animates Stewart's idea of the bibliophile's desire for absolute presence between signifier and signified. In this context, the "passage back" takes on the dual meaning of literary passage and route into the past, as the complete object of the book, including its formal aspects, ceases to function as a mere reference and achieves identity with the material it contains. We witness this identity in the book's historically authentic "Dress" and its warm hand leading the reader centuries back, creating a disruption in the boundaries of time that can only be described as uncanny. Indeed, Dickinson uses the vocabulary of the uncanny to express the antique book's peculiar liminal position: much like the "sundered Things" discussed earlier, the book / time traveler is ordinary, "familiar," yet it is invested with the properties of "Enchantment." Also like the sundered Things, the antique volume tantalizes without ever fulfilling its promise of reunion with the other world, in this case the world of the past.

Perhaps the most revealing lines of the poem concentrate on the nature of this promise: "And tell you all your Dreams—were true— / He lived—where Dreams were born—" It is not simply the world of the past that is the desired point of origin; instead, the past is conflated with a kind of dream world. This has further implications for why the book tantalizes the reader but fails to follow through. Time travel is impossible, and for this reason the past is fundamentally inaccessible, but it also seems that the reader has attributed the past with magical, dreamlike qualities that make the world of the past both more desirable and less attainable.

It is important to recall that Dickinson's use of the fascicle form reflects more than just a fascination with the relationship between reader and book; it also reminds us

of her preoccupation with scale and the miniature. Stewart's assertion that the significance of a miniature representation "is increased rather than diminished by its minuteness" reiterates the argument of Dickinson's "All I may, if small."

> All I may, if small,
> Do it not display
> Larger for the Totalness—
> 'Tis Economy
>
> To bestow a World
> And withhold a Star—
> Utmost, is Munificence—
> Less, tho' larger, poor.
> (J, 819)

Such a terse and cryptic poem requires a detailed elucidation of its literal meaning as well as its more abstract implications. Dickinson's topic has to do with generosity and the relative significance of various sizes of gifts. The first three lines can be read as a question: Even if all I can give is small, doesn't my offering mean more since it represents all that I have? The next three lines point out the penury in bestowing only one gigantic present, even a world, when you might offer multiple worlds or stars. The words "Utmost, is Munificence— / Less, tho' larger, poor," sum up a strange and stilted sort of homily: he who gives all that he owns is the more generous, even if his offering is comparatively small. According to one reading, this poem appears to be primarily concerned with taking a moral position, but I would contend that this ethic is also an artistic one. Her faith in the uncanny capacity of the minute to stand for the vast and summon the ineffable is evident in her reliance on this formula in nearly every aspect of her craft.

Consider the most basic visual encounter with a page from Dickinson. The poems are small, even fragile-looking, three- or four-line stanzas littered with dashes. The

dashes lend them an appearance of half-completion, even of partial destruction or ruin, which brings to mind the roofless house of "Possibility." Many critics have suggested that this incompleteness is Dickinson's acknowledgment that language inevitably fails to fully capture reality. If we are to understand poetry as a house or container in the way that she encourages us to, it follows that we might consider the units of language in terms of their capacity to hold meanings. Dickinson makes a practice of overfilling words and symbols so that they brim and flood, freighting them with multiple, privately invented meanings. A small, three-letter word like "Awe" becomes a signifier for an experience that is very specific but remains just beyond the communicable. Since no word or group of words can perfectly capture Dickinson's sublime, she overburdens one word, or a symbol like the flood, with a significance it would not necessarily carry outside of her body of work. In this sense, even her lexicon is uncanny, distilling amazing, unlikely meaning out of ordinary vocabulary. The fascicles themselves are comparably minute and freighted with meaning, a fact that prompts us to imagine these books as analogous to the words and symbols they contain.

Dickinson also uses uncanny proportions to re-imagine the brain, a more fundamental poetic tool than word, dash, or fascicle. This is appropriate, given that her almost mystical sense of scale and proportion is central to her understanding of creativity and the mind. "The Brain is wider than the Sky" uses an uncanny object to consider the strange connection between materiality and meaning, with particular attention to the mind's uncertain position in this relationship.

> The Brain—is wider than the Sky—
> For—put them side by side—
> The one the other will contain

With ease—and You—beside—

The Brain is deeper than the sea—
For—hold them—Blue to Blue—
The one the other will absorb—
As Sponges—Buckets—do—

The Brain is just the weight of God—
For—Heft them—Pound for Pound—
And they will differ—if they do—
As Syllable from Sound—
(J, 632)

This poem couples impossible assertions with explanations of their figurative truth, the riddle-like format demonstrating another weak point in the system of meaning that sets objects in correspondence with abstractions. For this reason, it is significant that Dickinson chooses the word "Brain" over the word "Mind." Assuming a dualist notion of the mind as a separate entity from the body, it is easy to imagine a vague, metaphysical force pervading and containing the physical world of sky and sea. To suppose that the brain might be capable of the same feat is less intuitive; it requires us as readers to renew our conception of scale, the capacities of objects, and not least, the capacities of the human body.

With the line "The Brain is just the weight of God," Dickinson seems to make the argument that these capacities are limitless, though she stipulates that the two "differ—if they do— / As Syllable from Sound." If any difference can be discerned, it must be that syllables function as a unit of sound, sound being the pervasive category of all that is audible. This analogy suggests that the brain is a unit of God, a minute but knowable entity with a mysterious awareness of an unknowable force, and possibly even an ability to channel this force. The image of the flood served in a bowl develops and deepens its

implications, as Dickinson persists in imagining and re-imagining an uncanny scale by which to measure the sublime.

The Herbarium

So far, this paper has joined Shira Wolosky in disputing the notion of Dickinson the librarian, "sift[ing] her emotions into little packets reminiscent of a card catalog" (xviii). I have established that Dickinson's choice of form deliberately disrupts the congruence of container and contained, packing forceful images and ideas into diminutive books and a seemingly fragile poetic structure. But it is important not to dismiss the image of the librarian from our minds too quickly; there is a reason that this version of Dickinson exists in the popular imagination.

As noted, the word "fascicle" is used in botany and anatomy to describe tiny bundles, collections, and clippings gathered for scientific categorization. Not incidentally, Dickinson was a gardener and a student of botany; she kept a 66-page herbarium of 424 flower specimens, labeled in accordance with the Linnaean system. It is hard to make the case that such classifications defy the temptation to sort and sift, that they purposefully draw attention to the troubled relationship of materiality and meaning. On the contrary, Susan Stewart describes the Victorian practice of pressing flowers as "that rather bourgeois taming of the sublime…Systematically, each sign of nature is transformed into a sign of culture, just as the domestic arts of the time turned pine cones into picture frames, sea shells into lamps, and enclosed a variety of natural objects, 'dried,' under glass" (Stewart, 75, 114). Stewart sees the impulse to collapse time and distance as a major motivating factor in the collection of souvenirs, and the same impulse

is evident in Dickinson's writing about her gardens: "My flowers are near and foreign, and I have but to cross the floor to stand in the Spice Isles" (quoted in Phillips, 140). In bringing the Spice Isles to the other side of the room, drying them out, and labeling them with Latin names, she imposes culture on nature, acting as librarian and botanist. While her hobbies as a gardener are, admittedly, distinct from her work as a poet, both are revelatory of the inner workings of Dickinson the individual, and are thus related. As biographer Richard Sewall argues, "Take Emily's herbarium far enough, and you have *her*" (quoted in Dickinson, Herbarium).

Grafting new meanings onto familiar material, Dickinson transforms the flowers into uncanny objects. This calls attention to the fact that, in certain places, the occupation of poet overlaps with the role of collector, namely in the construction of narrative.

> Through narrative the souvenir substitutes a context of perpetual consumption for its context or origin…like the collection, it always displays the romance of contraband, for its scandal is its removal from its 'natural' location…The souvenir speaks to a context of origin through a language of longing, for it is not an object arising out of need or use value; it is an object arising out of the necessarily insatiable demands of nostalgia. The souvenir generates a narrative which reaches only 'behind,' spiraling in a continually inward movement rather than outward toward the future. (Stewart, 135)

Here, the perpetually consumed context or origin could be the Spice Islands, standing for the exotic; or else the flowers are the romantic contraband of Dickinson's own garden. Like the realm of the dead, the natural world is ever-present but beyond full human comprehension, and so our nostalgia for it remains insatiable even when we deploy science and art, our main resources for shaping narrative. In this light, the project of the botanist poet begins to appear naïve, even futile, a problem that did not escape Dickinson:

> If the foolish, call them "*flowers*"

Need the wiser, *tell*?
If the Savants "Classify" them
It is just as well!

Those who read the "Revelations"
Must not criticize
Those who read the same Edition—
With beclouded Eyes!

Could we stand with that Old "Moses"—
"Canaan" denied—
Scan like him, the stately landscape
On the other side—

Doubtless, we should deem superfluous
Many Sciences,
Not pursued by learned Angels
In scholastic skies!

Low amid that glad Belles lettres
Grant that we may stand,
Stars, amid profound *Galaxies*—
At that grand "Right hand"!

(J, 168)

The imagery of "learned Angels / In scholastic skies" captures what Dickinson understands as the absurdity of using academic disciplines to pursue revelation. Notably, she uses the classification of flowers as her central example of this type of foolish pursuit. Still more interesting is her evocation of the Promised Land of Canaan, which echoes Stewart's notion of the longed-for point of origin. Dickinson contends that if we shared Moses' immediate vision of Canaan (uncannily situated "on the other side") then the impulse to collect, classify and study would disappear, seem "superfluous." This poem teaches us that Dickinson was conscious of the vain effort towards order and narrative that Stewart sees in the herbarium. It also shows that Dickinson believed that beautiful but impractical gestures of this sort were still worth making. Adopting a humble persona,

she expresses ironic gratitude for her place amid the "Belles lettres," a category of writing that is aesthetically pleasing rather than instructive or useful.

The speaker in "What mystery pervades a well!" proves to be another skeptic of science, though in this case the statements of doubt are coupled with the language of tourism. It is illuminating to watch how this perspective gives shape to the idea of nature as an inaccessible, romanticized place of origin.

> What mystery pervades a well!
> That water lives so far—
> A neighbor from another world
> Residing in a jar
>
> Whose limit none have ever seen,
> But just his lid of glass—
> Like looking every time you please
> In an abyss's face!
>
> The grass does not appear afraid,
> I often wonder he
> Can stand so close and look so bold
> At what is awe to me…
>
> But nature is a stranger yet;
> The ones that cite her most
> Have never passed her haunted house,
> Nor simplified her ghost.
>
> To pity those that know her not
> Is helped by the regret
> That those who know her, know her less
> The nearer her they get.
>
> (J, 1400)

The speaker is ecstatic, awed and intimidated by the spectacle of the well, almost as if she were glimpsing freaks at a sideshow. Like much of the bizarre, its appeal lies in its simultaneous foreignness and familiarity. The well is unfathomable, an abyss; none have ever seen its limit, yet it is also remarkable for its complete accessibility— you can peer

in “every time you please.” In Dickinson, discussions of nature and the knowledge of nature are often self-consciously approached from the perspective of the voyeur, and thus framed in the language of the uncanny.

The “neighbor from another world” (perhaps the speaker’s reflection in the well water) also suggests the voyeur, but more than this, it reinforces the presence of the uncanny in the poem and recalls Susan Stewart’s notion of collapsed distance and proximate boundaries. As the jar where the otherworldly neighbor resides, at once exotic and close by, the well is an uncanny container. Stewart understands the uncanny container as a spectacle of both the gigantic and the natural:

> Our most fundamental relation to the gigantic is articulated in our relation to landscape, our immediate and lived relation to nature as it ‘surrounds’ us. Our position here is the antithesis of our relation to the miniature; we are enveloped by the gigantic, surrounded by it, enclosed within its shadow. Whereas we know the miniature as a spatial whole or as temporal parts, we know the gigantic only partially….Consequently, both the miniature and the gigantic may be described through metaphors of containment—the miniature as contained, the gigantic as container. (71)

In Dickinson’s fascicles, we have observed an attempt to disrupt this structure of containment, to upend the librarian’s sorting of miniature into average into gigantic. This reordering of scale, especially in the context of the natural world, bears a strong relationship to the concept of the sublime, which is concerned with human experience of the grandeur and enormity of nature. If keeping an herbarium of tiny flowers amounts to a “rather bourgeois taming of the sublime,” a vision of nature on a gigantic scale also renders it tame. Stewart argues that because the viewer gazing out over a sublime spectacle maintains her awareness of the gigantic as a frame, she re-imposes the system of containers on her surroundings. While the minute is contained and sorted into books,

the gigantic in nature is accordingly established as uncontainable, either by human understanding or scope of vision.

Dickinson is devoted to reckoning with this concept of scale and the limitations it imposes on experience. Indeed, it is her fascination with the limits of the human mind that allows her to begin to compensate for them. Her statement "That those who know [nature], know her less / The nearer her they get," is perfectly consistent with Stewart's discussion of the inadequacy of the human senses when it comes to perceiving the natural gigantic as a whole. These lines may also have a more metaphysical significance, with respect to the elusive "mystery" that pervades the well. Dickinson seems to express doubt in the capacity of physical reality to represent an abstract or invisible world. In reiterating the issue of the troubled relationship of materiality and meaning, she compels us to wonder how our notions of nature are formed, and why these notions obscure our understanding instead of developing it.

The tone turns from one of awe to an almost defiant naïveté, as the speaker dismisses the explanations of nature by those "who cite her most," presumably in botanical journals or moral homilies. Her nostalgia is for a narrative of nature that transcends the purely utilitarian, but this does not mean that the worldview provided by séances and theosophical societies is sufficient, either; the speaker warns against simplifying nature's "ghost." Haunting, here, is not as much an argument for a supernatural understanding of the world as it is an objection to all human strategies of explanation, not excluding art. As Dickinson wrote in a letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Nature is a haunted House— but Art— is a House that tries to be haunted" (Johnson, Letters, 535).

This remark can be read as a position on the artist's ability to create a book or painting which functions effectively as an uncanny object, mediating visible and invisible worlds. Dickinson seems to contend that it is not enough to render the world, to make a facsimile or copy; instead, the artist must attempt to recreate reality in all its mystery and mutability. In this respect, the poet's creative impulse overlaps with the collector's desire to forge an absolute presence between signifier and signified. The difference seems to lie in their potential for real success. Stewart explains that "the magic of the souvenir is a kind of failed magic," because "the place of origin must remain unavailable in order for desire to be generated" (151). Dickinson phrased this idea differently in a letter to a distant acquaintance: "I would love to know your 'Ferns and Grasses' and touch your 'Books and Pictures'—but it is of realms unratified that Magic is made" (Johnson, Letters, 561). While the poet's magic may also fail, Dickinson seems to allow some artists the capability to conjure a haunting.

But why should this be? I have cited Dickinson's investigations of materiality and meaning as examples of how she uses the form and substance of her craft to acknowledge and amplify the concerns Stewart raises about the romantic narrative of the souvenir, which emerges from the insatiable nostalgia of the collector for a place of origin. I have anticipated criticisms of Dickinson the botanist, and concluded that her contribution to discourses on nature and knowledge of nature dismisses purely scientific and spiritualist approaches in favor of some sort of artistic intuition, for lack of a better term. Still, it remains unclear what makes the artist's magic succeed where the collector's fails.

The key seems to lie in the artist's immediate access to the desired place of origin. While the collector and the explorer must comb the external world for souvenirs of authenticity, the poet "spreading wide [her] narrow Hands" is, essentially, turning inward. Dickinson's advice to the sixteenth-century conquistador Hernando de Soto, the first European to reach the Mississippi River, corroborates this line of reasoning:

> Soto! Explore thyself!
> Therein thyself shall find
> The "Undiscovered Continent" –
> No Settler had the Mind.
> (J, 832)

The Letters

Having decided that Dickinson's poetic project demands turning inward, towards the hidden world of the mind, it may seem counterintuitive to embark on an examination of her correspondence. It is important to establish that letter writing, for Dickinson, functions to a great extent as a branch of her literary pursuits. As Thomas Johnson, editor of both her poems and letters, writes, "the letters both in style and rhythm begin to take on qualities that are so nearly the quality of her poems as on occasion to leave the reader in doubt where the letter leaves off and the poem begins" (Letters, xv). Indeed, Dickinson seems persuaded that writing a letter, though typically a social practice, may qualify as a venture into the "Undiscovered Continent." "A letter always feels to me like immortality," she explains, "because it is the mind alone without corporeal friend. Indebted in our talk to attitude and accent, there seems a spectral power in thought that walks alone" (Johnson, Letters, 447).

Dickinson's likening of a letter to a specter or a magical projection of the self is clearly an uncanny simile, suggesting as it does a familiar object that is endowed with an

amazing power: the ability to represent meaning divorced from its original material source. At this point it should not surprise us that Dickinson proposes an understanding of the letter as souvenir. These stanzas from an early poem are marked by their almost comical sentimentality:

> In Ebon box, when years have flown
> To reverently peer,
> Wiping away the velvet dust
> Summers have sprinkled there!
>
> To hold a letter to the light—
> Grown Tawny now, with time—
> To con the faded syllables
> That quickened us like Wine!
> (J, 169)

The nineteenth-century sensibilities evoked by this poem seeped into the era's epistolary conventions. In their book Letter Writing as a Social Practice, David Barton and Nigel Hall write,

> The Victorian preoccupation with mourning by the middle of the nineteenth century was reflected in the whole etiquette of stationary usage. In addition to black sealing wax, black leather blotters and jet paper knives, sets of [black-bordered] stationery with cards, writing paper and envelopes became common. (99)

But for Dickinson, the fascination of letters extends beyond sentimental value. Even as a young correspondent, she demonstrates an awareness of the letter's physicality as essential to its function, but irrelevant to its meaning. In two early letters, she pays particular attention to scale as an essential part of form, referring to the blank page as "a mammoth sheet," and confessing, "I hesitate which word to take, as I can take but few and each must be the chiefest" (Johnson, Letters, 9, 649). These quotes, which appear to contradict each other, reveal an understanding of the letter's scale as mutable, despite its fixed materiality as an object. Irrespective of its physical dimensions, an unmarked page

is mammoth-sized because of its great capaciousness, its untried potential to represent experience. At the same time, physical dimensions reassert themselves: there is only room for a few words. Yet if each word the writer chooses is "chiefest" in meaning, the mental space it may occupy is limitless.

This notion of the letter's contained boundlessness is developed by the poem "The Way I read a Letter's—This."

> The Way I read a Letter's—This—
> 'Tis first—I lock the Door—
> And push it with my fingers—next—
> For transport it be sure—
>
> And then I go the furthest off
> To counteract a knock—
> Then draw my little Letter forth
> And slowly pick the lock—
>
> Then—glancing narrow, at the Wall—
> And narrow at the floor
> For firm Conviction of a Mouse
> Not exorcised before—
>
> Peruse how infinite I am
> To no one that You— know—
> And sigh for lack of Heaven—but not
> The Heaven God bestow—
>
> (J, 636)

The speaker establishes and re-establishes boundaries to the point of obsession. Her care to lock the door and her impulse to hide from visitors are compounded by anxieties about invading mice; even the envelope containing the letter is described in the vocabulary of boundaries. Dickinson describes the unsealing of the "little letter" as "pick[ing] the lock," suggesting we imagine the envelope as a miniature door, which in turn suggests the letter as analogous to the room in which the speaker is locked. Unlike the door,

however, the envelope is opened. Once its container is breached, the letter reveals its boundlessness, allowing the speaker to peruse some sort of "infinity." It seems that the way Dickinson's speaker reads a letter involves a system of uncanny containers, which necessitates that she only pick locks and peruse infinity within a sealed and resealed space.

While the narrow gaze that peruses infinity may remind us of the narrow hands that gather paradise, the dwelling in "The Way I read a Letter" appears hermetically sealed, in contrast to the roofless and well-fenestrated house of "Possibility." The reason for this difference may inhere in theme. While it is widely argued that the subject of "I dwell in Possibility" is Dickinson's occupation as a poet, the implication in "The Way I read a Letter" is that the speaker has received a message from a lover. She peruses the infinity she represents for the coyly unnamed letter-writer, who is "no one that you—Know—" and sighs for a "lack of Heaven," perhaps referring to the lover's absence. In differentiating the heaven of a friend or lover from "The Heaven God bestow," Dickinson suggests that the love letter evokes an earthly paradise. The gathered paradise of poetic consciousness in "I dwell in Possibility" also amounts to a heaven on earth. Yet it would be a mistake to equate love letter and poem, or infer that they are souvenirs of the same sort of paradise. Poetry is immediately, freely available to Dickinson, given that she has identified her own dwelling as its source. The love letter, however, represents a state of reunion that remained inaccessible to Dickinson throughout most of her life, confirming Stewart's observation that "the [souvenir's] place of origin must remain unavailable in order for desire to be generated." This helps explain why the speaker reads a letter the way she does, opening it within a remote, private and sealed-off space, so as to mark and

preserve the desire it represents, maintaining its unavailability in ordinary life. Curiously, this amounts to a strategy for prolonging and amplifying pain, rather than relieving it.

One of Emily Dickinson's most famous letters links unrequited love with longing for death, heaven, nature, and other points of imagined reunion. The second of three drafted letters, addressed to an individual she called "Master," also helps demonstrate how the language of uncanny scale and distance works to express this specific brand of nostalgia. In contrast with the constantly hovering irony of her poems, Dickinson's voice in the Master Letters is alarmingly earnest and pleading. This departure in tone reminds us that, while the Master Letters can be understood as coextensive with Dickinson's poetic project, they act on an unrequited longing that the poems usually only represent, and are therefore more closely identified with the souvenir.[1]

> Master.
> If you saw a bullet hit a Bird—and he told you he was'nt [sic] shot—you might weep at his courtesy, but you would certainly doubt his word.
>
> One drop more from the gash that stains your Daisy's bosom—then would you *believe*? Thomas' faith in Anatomy, was stronger than his faith in faith. God made me—Master—I didn't be—myself. I dont [sic] know how it was done. He built the heart in me—Bye and bye it outgrew me—and like the little mother—with the big child—I got tired holding him… If it had been God's will that I might breathe where you breathed and find the place—myself—at night—if I never forget that I am not with you—and that sorrow and frost are nearer than I…
>
> Vesuvius dont talk—Etna—dont—one of them—said a syllable—a thousand years ago, and Pompeii heard it, and hid forever—she could'nt [sic] look the world in the face, afterward—I suppose—Bashful Pompeii! 'Tell you of the want'—you know

[1] Of course, this argument rests on the assumptions that Dickinson sent or at least intended to send the Master Letters, and that Master was a real person. Though these assumptions remain beyond proof, circumstantial evidence is in their favor.

> what a leech is, dont you—and Daisy's arm is small—and you have felt the horizon hav'nt [sic] you—and did the sea—never come so close as to make you dance?
>
> …I dont know what you can do for it—thank you—Master—but if I had the Beard on my cheek—like you—and you—had Daisy's petals—and you cared so for me—what would become of you? Could you forget me in a fight, or flight—or the foreign land? …I used to think that when I died—I could see you—so I died as fast as I could—but the 'Corporation' are going [to] Heaven too so [Eternity] wont be sequestered—now—Say I may wait for you—say I need go with no stranger to the to me—untried fold…
>
> Could you come to New England—would you come to Amherst—Would you like to come—Master?
>
> …then I could play in the woods till Dark—till you take me where Sundown cannot find us—and the true keep coming—till the town is full… (Johnson, Letters, 374-375)

Uncanny scale is most evident in the personas Dickinson adopts, both for herself and for Master. At first, they simply seem to establish a radically imbalanced power dynamic, with Dickinson masquerading as a bird or a daisy as she addresses the unequivocally dominant Master. But scale also upsets this dynamic, as when Dickinson casts herself as Vesuvius or Mount Etna, and Master is the buried town of Pompeii, overwhelmed and rendered "Bashful" by Dickinson's confessions of love. The mother who has given birth is another persona that we associate with expulsive imagery. She explains that her heart once fit inside of her, but "Bye and bye it outgrew me— and like the little mother— with the big child—I got tired holding him." Uncanny scale is not only a means of representing the confounding power relationship between Dickinson and Master; it is also integral to Dickinson's articulations of her feelings for him. The metaphors of erupting volcano and pregnant mother establish Dickinson herself as an uncanny container for emotions she cannot continue to hold. Yet both images depict the stillness that comes after the birth or eruption, and not the actual moment of expulsion.

This implies a dormant period in Dickinson's confessions, which she brings to an end by writing this letter, an overflowing document that enacts the same notion of the uncanny container that it seeks to represent in metaphor.

Uncanny distance bears a special relevance to the love letter. As a souvenir that traverses physical boundaries in order to bridge two worlds, the love letter reminds us of Susan Stewart's observation that the souvenir's intended function is to collapse our sense of distance in space and time. Dickinson builds on this idea with the parts of the letter she devotes to the distance between herself and Master. She first draws attention to this issue as she wonders what her life might have been "If it had been God's will that I might breathe where you breathed." The nostalgia of this moment is counteracted by her immediate acknowledgment that "I never forget that I am not with you…that sorrow and frost are nearer than I." The unrequited love letter amplifies the sense of the same distance that it aims to bridge or close. In order for Dickinson to give Master an idea "of the want" she feels for him, she must find a way to express the uncanniness of an absent presence. She attempts this by playing with proximity, asking "…you have felt the horizon have'nt [sic] you—and did the sea—never come so close as to make you dance?" The sea comes close, but it moves in tides that cause it to recede and then return; like the unreachable horizon, its proximity is uncanny, its boundaries impossible to permanently establish. The frightening pull of the sea's undertow and the horizon's persistent reminder of mortality both help us understand this "want" spatially.

These images evoke the unfathomable in terms of depth and distance, indicating that Dickinson's want may be impossible to satisfy. Yet in creating this document, she continues to pursue a reunion with Master. The letter is both an invitation in the plainest

sense ("Could you come to New England—would you come to Amherst—Would you like to come—Master?") and a souvenir that promises the collapse or transformation of distance. Throughout the text, Dickinson attempts to conjure a world where such a transformation could occur and enable her reunion with Master. These imagined points of reunion include death, heaven, and nature, the same longed-for places of origin whose souvenirs we have watched her gather. "I used to think that when I died—I could see you," she confides, "so I died as fast as I could." In purporting to speak from beyond the grave, or perhaps from the liminal state described in "Of nearness to her sundered Things," Dickinson makes the implicit promise of the souvenir explicit, alleging that it is possible to move back and forth between profoundly disparate worlds. Yet it is this capacity for uncanny travelling that allows Dickinson to dismiss even the worlds of heaven and death as inadequate for her purposes. She worries that she and Master won't find seclusion in the afterlife: "the 'Corporation' are going [to] Heaven too so [Eternity wont [sic] be sequestered—now."

The point of reunion she settles on is an earthly rather than a supernatural paradise. Just after her suggestion that Master visit New England, she seems to imagine a transformation of Amherst into an almost primordial landscape. "Then I could play in the woods till Dark—till you take me where Sundown cannot find us—and the true keep coming—till the town is full." The isolated couple in the forest strongly suggests a return not just to nature, but to the ultimate point of origin, Eden. With this proposal, the letter fulfills the dual purpose of the souvenir as Stewart understands it: "The double function of the souvenir is to authenticate a past or otherwise remote experience and, at the same time, to discredit the present…The nostalgia of the souvenir plays in the distance between

the present and an imagined, prelapsarian experience" (139). In her efforts to conjure her own private Eden, Dickinson seems almost hyperaware of this dichotomy. Her desire for a place beyond the reach of sundown starkly contrasts her earlier question about whether Master has ever felt the horizon. In this prelapsarian forest, mortality and the faults or distances it creates between worlds no longer pose a threat. The restored and repopulated world she imagines, where the true keep coming until the town is full, appears to be a place where souvenirs and the voyeurism of longing are no longer necessary.

The letter form is crucial here because it indicates that Dickinson's project is not purely an artistic one, of imagining and describing reunion with nature or freedom from death. Instead, by inviting a living person to a physical place with the promised result of restoring Eden, Dickinson attempts to bring this dreamed world into reality through sheer force of will. I believe that attending to this formal strategy of transcendence helps form a more thorough understanding of Dickinson's intentions for all the documents and artifacts she created, whether we categorize them as poetry, botany, or correspondence. She did not want them to be ordinary renderings; she meant them to be ghosts.

Conclusion

In the process of reading Emily Dickinson with On Longing in mind, I have found that Dickinson's work often bears out Susan Stewart's ideas about narratives of the souvenir. Where this is not the case, Dickinson provides an important exception or useful counterexample to Stewart's argument. But this paper has not yet explicitly addressed the fundamental tension between these two sources and the understandings of the world that they promote.

This difference is perhaps best illustrated by the example of the Edenic world to which Dickinson invites Master. Using Stewart's definition, I have argued that that this invitation is a souvenir, an object whose intended function is to collapse distance in space and time. I have further argued that Dickinson chose the letter form as part of a strategy of transcendence, of willing an imagined world into existence. Yet Stewart contends that this attempt at creating an uncanny boundary, at restoring the breach between two disparate worlds, ends inevitably with the souvenir's failed magic, its broken promise. Indeed, Stewart seems to understand the impulse to collect souvenirs as inherently flawed, a symptom of "the social disease of nostalgia."

> Nostalgia is a sadness without an object, a sadness which creates a longing that of necessity is inauthentic because it does not take part in lived experience. The prevailing motif of nostalgia is the erasure of the gap between nature and culture…The nostalgic's utopia is prelapsarian, a genesis where lived and mediated experience are one, where authenticity and transcendence are both present and everywhere. (23)

There is no disputing Dickinson's intricate comprehension of human tendencies like desire and nostalgia. For this reason it is hard to entertain the notion of her as a victim of the social disease Stewart describes. And yet, Stewart has articulated Dickinson's vision of reunion with Master quite accurately in this passage: a utopian return to origin that exists outside of lived experience, where natural and personal boundaries are not mediated but erased. If the forest where "the true keep coming" is indeed a failed nostalgic fantasy, how can Dickinson pursue its creation while maintaining her intellectual honesty?

Perhaps the question isn't whether Dickinson is a nostalgic, but what she does in the face of nostalgic yearning. Her poems and letters are filled with instances of renunciation— "The Soul selects her own Society /Then—shuts the Door—" (J, 303) – but ultimately, she asserts that the cost of complete self-denial is vision:

> Renunciation— is a piercing Virtue—
> The letting go
> A Presence—for an Expectation—
> Not now—
> The putting out of Eyes—
> Just Sunrise—
> Lest Day—
> Day's Great Progenitor—
> Outvie…
>
> (J, 745)

The gruesome "piercing" of one's eyes for virtue's sake amounts to a forfeiture of agency and creative power. For this reason, self-denial is an unsustainable feature of Dickinson's negotiations of nostalgia. She does "close the Valves of her attention— / Like Stone—" but these moments are part of larger narratives of longing and reunion, which find a central place in her work and life.

Rather than disowning these narratives because their magic threatens to fail, Dickinson exaggerates them, amplifying her "want" until it can no longer be ignored. As she once wrote in a letter, "Great Hungers feed themselves, but little Hungers ail in vain" (Johnson, Letters, 668). It is in this way that the smaller cravings of nostalgia, which compelled Dickinson to collect booklets and pressed flowers, transform into fascinated longings capable of feeding her inner life for decades. Perhaps she had the lost worlds of nature, love and death in mind when she wrote

> To fill a Gap
> Insert the Thing that caused it—
> Block it up

With Other— and 'twill yawn the more—
You cannot solder an Abyss
With Air.

(J, 546)

The speaker's solution to the gap of nostalgia appears irksomely simple: find whatever is missing, and put it back where it was. Stewart argues that these gaps, or distances in time and space, are by necessity impossible to fill because of their role in generating nostalgic desire. And in fact, taking hold of the "Thing that caused it" does seem to be out of the question in cases of nostalgia; if this person, place or Thing were readily accessible, there would hardly be an opportunity for the nostalgia it generates to grow.

Perhaps this helps explain Dickinson's impulse towards the transcendent, her tendency to try and force longed-for worlds into reality using only her mind. She may not have the "Thing" that caused the "Gap," but as novelist Marilynne Robinson observes, "To crave and to have are as like as a thing and its shadow" (152). Indeed, it is because nostalgia is a self-generating force, as Stewart observes, that the poet is able to fill the gap left by nostalgia with narratives of longing. Ultimately, Dickinson's use of the souvenir as a formal and metaphorical tool amounts to an attempt to bend the force of yearning to her will, to achieve identity between the world she lived in and the world she wanted.

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